DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 298 564 CS 506 336

AUTHOR Sanacore, Joseph
TITLE Improving Oral Communication by Focusing on Audience.
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audience Analysis; *Communication Skills; Elementary Secondary Education; Reading Writing Relationship; *Speech Communication; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Audience Awareness; Communication Behavior

ABSTRACT

Effective speakers often think about their audience as they organize and articulate ideas. This important link between speaker and listener should be supported in classrooms throughout the school year. Teachers can foster this development by motivating speakers to interact with others and by encouraging individuals to make inferences concerning the subtleties of audiences' backgrounds. As children become more sensitive to the speaker-listener relationship, they will realize the overlap to the writer-reader context. This awareness demonstrates to students that the broadly based language arts are a better source of support than is isolated fragmentation. Children need direct exposure to activities that guide them to think more specifically about their intended listeners. Teachers can form intraclass groups and motivate speakers to interact with other students by: (1) modeling the intended behaviors of the audience; (2) observing students to determine how well they apply the newly learned behaviors; (3) providing students with much guided practice until they demonstrate facility with reading outlines and drafts of speeches and making pertinent comments; and (4) guiding students to communicate to a unique public, such as pre-school children. (A list of Considerations for Supporting the Speaker-Listener Relationship is attached.) (RAE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED298564

Improving Oral Communication by Focusing on Audience

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Dr. Joseph Sanacore

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

by Dr. Joseph Sanacore
Hofstra University
Hempstead, New York 11550

CS506336

Effective speakers often think about their audience as they organize and articulate ideas. This important link between speaker and listener should be supported in classrooms throughout the school year. However, reminding children to focus on their audience is inadequate for helping them to improve their oral communication. What children need is direct exposure to activities that guide them to think more specifically about their intended listeners.

Interaction

One way of developing a sense of audience is by interacting with other students. Virtually all children can benefit from an interactive classroom because it creates a genuine audience of peers and it provides opportunities to observe how words affect others. According to Kroll (1978, p. 831), "Powerful learning occurs when children experience the failure or success of their words to communicate to peers." Through first-hand experiences, such as the following, speakers can gain insights about a variety of audiences:

1. Students meet in intraclass (heterogeneous) groups to share outlines and drafts of speeches. Peers are encouraged to react concerning the accuracy of content, transition of ideas, relevant and irrelevant details, organization, and other areas. Meanwhile, the teacher visits each group and provides guidance. The teacher may also model the intended behaviors of the audience by reading aloud his/her own outline or draft while the group follows silently with duplicate copies. During this activity, the teacher pauses and comments on positive aspects as well as areas that need improvement. Afterward, he/she observes to determine how well students apply the newly learned behaviors. Usually, much guided practice is needed before students demonstrate ease with creating outlines

and drafts and making pertinent comments. This practice, however, is valuable because it helps speakers to develop a deeper awareness of listeners and, consequently, to deliver more effective speeches.

2. In addition to making speeches, students increase their sensitivity to audience by communicating with a unique public. For example, high school students can write and illustrate stories for preschool children and then can engage in storytelling sessions. This blending of activities was carried out in a Long Island (New York) school district. Twelfth graders enrolled in a creative writing course worked in groups and shared ideas about writing for three- and four-year-olds who attended the district's preschool. The seniors prepared for their audience by discussing younger siblings, reading children's literature already published, and observing the actual audience in the preschool. Then, the seniors wrote children's books while focusing on devices for storytelling. They used alliteration, repeated refrains, and incremental refrains because these devices entice listeners to participate in the creative dramatics of storytelling. Throughout these experiences, the teacher motivated students to share ideas about improving communication as it related to the audience.

> ...the prospect of a real audience, eager to hear the stories, [was] both a valuable motivation for the seniors and a useful simulation of the working conditions of professional writers. (Sanacore, 1983, p. 509)

Challenging Assumptions

Helping students consider the perspective of others is a difficult task since children, from the elementary through the junior

high school years, demonstrate levels of thinking that are self-centered. This egocentrism is a major cause of poor communication because it characterizes thinking that is based on one's own point of view. (Piaget, 1955) Whether children are speaking or writing, they need to grow beyond their egocentric perspective. Kroll (1978) argues that mere reminders of considering the audience's point of view are inadequate; rather, children need exposure to contexts in which they are actively involved in the audience's awareness. The following situations support such involvement by challenging students' beliefs that they are sensitive to the views of others:

1. Explain the rules of a game to a group of students. When they understand the rules, have the students articulate them to others. As the listeners attempt to use the potentially confusing instructions, the explainers have opportunities to observe their faulty assumptions of the audience's perspective.
2. Ask children to write or dictate directions for making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Afterward, require them to observe others following the directions. The outcomes may be humorous and messy as the children realize that their unclear directions have led to misunderstanding and that peers have spread jelly on their hands instead of on the bread.
3. Use a variation of cognitive stereoscopy which has an underlying principle "that knowledge comes when some other experience is perceived through at least two perspectives at once." (Bleich, 1986, p. 99) In developing a stereoscopic sense in writers and speakers, the teacher emphasizes the double-script/-speech assignment within a series of assignments. This longterm approach helps students to identify and compare features of their communication. For example, when focusing on different perspectives of the

audience, students can role play one description for peers and a second description related to the same topic for the teacher. Thus, if the topic concerns a fight that occurred during the football game, students probably will experience difficulty ranging from the use of informal language for peers to the use of formal language for the teacher. This conflict, however, is positive because it further challenges students' assumptions that they are sensitive to the audiences' points of view; it also helps children to be more flexible when responding to a variety of audiences. As students complete these double-type assignments on a longterm basis, they have opportunities to determine progress with different points of view as well as with other aspects of their communication.

Inferring Audiences' Backgrounds

Exposure to these and similar activities encourages children to make inferences concerning their audiences' backgrounds. However, as children speak and write, they need additional guidance in making better inferences, or educated guesses, about their audiences' knowledge, needs, beliefs, and power and status. (Beach and Liebman - Kleine, 1986)

Concerning knowledge, children sometimes misjudge what their audiences know about a subject. For instance, if listeners have much awareness of the topic presented, they do not need to be exposed to basic facts. On the other hand, if they have little knowledge, they need specific details to understand the unfamiliar ideas. Teachers should help speakers to develop a "feel" for these situations so that speeches do not bore or frustrate intended listeners.

Besides knowledge, audiences have needs for types of information that are useful in carrying out tasks or performing certain actions. Thus, if children are making paper airplanes, they will benefit from clear,sequential directions rather than from a historical perspective.

Concerning beliefs, the speaker considers the audience's opinions of his/her topic, uses a strategy to accommodate those opinions, and predicts the audience's reaction. Therefore, in preparing an argumentative speech, the speaker may gain credibility with the opposing audience by restating its position and then by refuting it.

Finally,with power and status, the speaker thinks about these attributes as they relate to him/herself and the audience. For example, an individual who is speaking to an authority figure knows that it is inappropriate to tell the authority figure what to do. Conversely, speakers who are attempting to demonstrate their own power or status may directly state their expertise or may show the ability to argue their case. Effective speakers are constantly assessing their right to criticize, order, request, etc.

Beach and Liebman-Kleine's model of audience analysis is intended for the writer-reader relationship, but it also has value for supporting the link between the speaker and listener. By guiding students to infer the background of the audience, the teacher increases their chances of communicating more effectively with the audience.

Summary

Helping students to think about their audiences promotes better communication. Teachers can foster this development by motivating speakers to interact with others, by challenging students' beliefs

that they are sensitive to different points of view, and by encouraging individuals to make inferences concerning the subtleties of audiences' backgrounds. As children become more sensitive to the speaker-listener relationship, they will realize the overlap to the writer-reader context. This awareness demonstrates to students that the broadly based language arts are a better source of support than is isolated fragmentation.

References

Beach, Richard, and JoAnne Liebman-Kleine. "The Writing/Reading Relationship: Becoming One's Own Best Reader." In Convergences: Transactions in Reading and Writing, edited by Bruce T. Petersen. Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1986, pp. 64-81.

Bleich, David. "Cognitive Stereoscopy and the Study of Language and Literature." In Convergences: Transactions in Reading and Writing, edited by Bruce T. Petersen. Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1986, pp. 99-114.

Kroll, Barry M. "Developing a Sense of Audience." Language Arts, vol. 55 (October 1978), pp. 828-31.

Piaget, Jean. The Language and Thought of the Child. Translated by Marjorie Gabain. New York, N.Y.: New American Library, 1955.

Sanacore, Joseph. "Creative Writing and Storytelling: A Bridge from High School to Preschool." Phi Delta Kappan, vol. 64 (March 1983), pp. 509-10.

Considerations for Supporting the Speaker-Listener Relationship

Interaction

The teacher forms intraclass groups and motivates speakers to interact with other students by:

1. modeling the intended behaviors of the audience
2. observing students to determine how well they apply the newly learned behaviors
3. providing students with much guided practice until they demonstrate facility with reading outlines and drafts of speeches and making pertinent comments
4. guiding students to communicate to a unique public, such as preschool children

Challenging Assumptions

The teacher challenges speakers' beliefs that they are sensitive to different audience perspectives by:

1. having students explain the rules of a game to others and then observe the listeners using the potentially confusing rules
2. asking individuals to dictate or write directions for making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and then to observe others following the unclear directions
3. emphasizing double-script/-speech assignments that focus on different audience perspectives of the same topic

Audience Attributes

The teacher encourages speakers to infer the following audience attributes:

1. knowledge
2. needs (information or actions)
3. beliefs
4. power and status